



Stop Militarizing Our Communities

5 Things You Need to Know About the 1033 Program

Image description: A close-up picture of a police car at a traffic light.

Introduction

As cops dressed in riot gear and wielding weapons of war have become commonplace in our communities, the line between police and military forces is becoming increasingly blurred. It's no coincidence: policing in the United States is inextricably linked to our militarized foreign policy. Just as we sell arms to repressive foreign security forces around the world, we equip police here at home with military weapons. State violence in the U.S. and abroad are two sides of the same coin — one that prioritizes the profits of weapons manufacturers, the prison system, and the defense industry largely at the expense of working class, exploited, Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color. If we are to confront this militarization of policing, we need to understand

where it's coming from. While it is policing itself — and not merely the weapons — that is the problem, one aspect of serious concern is the Department of Defense's 1033 Program (also known as the Law Enforcement Support Office Program), which funnels military weaponry to domestic law enforcement and border patrol while encouraging police to behave like soldiers of war. So what is the 1033 Program, and what do we need to know to dismantle it?

**“The best way to avoid political violence is to enhance justice at home and abroad.” - Alex Vitale,
*The End of Policing***

1

It provides free, military-grade weapons to local police forces... and incentivizes them to use it.



A black-and-white picture of police officers wearing "riot gear" - large shields, full-body protection, and large helmets.

The [1033 Program](#) transfers the military's extra or outdated weapons and equipment to state and local authorities, as well as **Customs and Border Protection (CBP)**, — **just for the cost of shipping.** This includes armored vehicles, assault rifles, grenades, and Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles (MRAPs), all coming out of the Pentagon's over-inflated budget. As if pushing these weapons into our communities is not bad enough, the program contracts typically require that **the equipment must be [used within one year of receipt](#)** or else it must be returned to the federal government.

11,500+

They've received

Domestic law enforcement agencies

have taken part in the 1033 program

\$7,400,000,000

worth of equipment

36%

of the property transferred pursuant to the program is

brand new

and a result of wasteful Pentagon spending

130

College and university police departments

have received weaponry and equipment valued at more than \$12,000,000

2

Missing equipment, incomplete records, and ignored rules... 1033 has little oversight.

The only significant responsibilities that participating law enforcement agencies have under 1033 is to (1) Not sell equipment obtained through the program and (2) Maintain accurate inventories of the transferred equipment. But both local and federal agencies have [proven inconsistent](#) in keeping track.

Audits of police departments have revealed a severe lack of record-keeping and all too many cases of [missing equipment](#). While recipients of the program are only encouraged to use the equipment for the purpose of “counterdrug and counterterrorism activities,” **there is neither [proper oversight](#) of the program nor a credible reason these weapons should be used for these purposes.**

Case Study: GAO Investigation



A black-and-white picture of an empty parking garage, with a single table and chairs under a bright light.

A made-up, non-existent “law enforcement agency” received \$1,200,000 worth of military gear from the 1033 Program. In 2017, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) created a [fictitious law enforcement agency](#) — featuring a fake website and an address that traced back to an empty parking lot — and obtained \$1.2 million worth of military gear, including night-vision goggles, simulated M-16A2 rifles, and bomb-making materials.

“It was like getting stuff off of Ebay” - [Zina Merritt](#), director of the GAO’s defense capabilities and management team

3

Recipients of equipment do not receive mandatory training, allowing a pernicious "warrior mentality" to spread unchecked.



A black-and-white picture of a person being escorted into a police car by the Portland Police.

The Department of Defense [does not provide training](#) for recipients of the 1033 Program — agencies are left to [certify their own training](#) with little to no oversight. The requirement and incentive to use the transferred equipment encourages warlike policing. **This further reinforces the "us vs. them" mentality that is responsible for such devastation around the globe.** A lack of instruction exacerbates these issues by imbuing officers with the confidence to use deadly weapons without training.

4

Schools across the country have applied for, and received, free military-grade equipment.

The thought of untrained soldiers occupying our communities becomes even scarier when you realize that [school districts across the country have received millions of dollars of equipment from the 1033 Program](#), including firearms, utility trucks, and rifles. In 2015, President Obama issued [Executive Order 13688](#), which prohibited law enforcement agencies solely serving schools

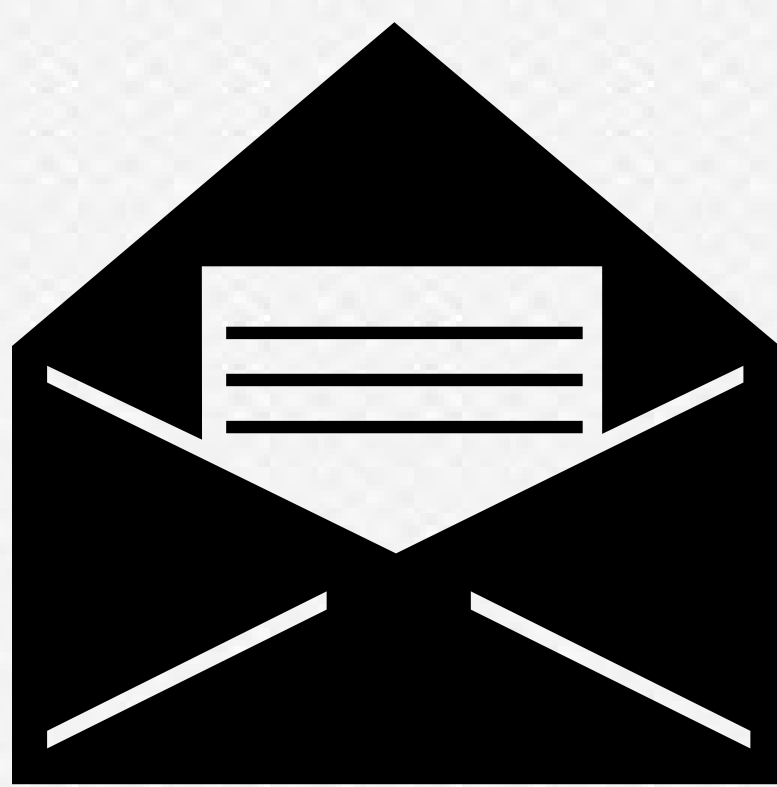
with grades K-12 from acquiring certain weapons from the federal government. In 2017, President Trump [rescinded](#) that Executive Order. **Black, Indigenous, and other students of color already receive disproportionate punishment at school — consider the consequences, then, when school police make decisions about using assault weapons on school grounds.**

“In Los Angeles... the school district police department received a mine-resistant vehicle worth \$730,000 in March, as well as three grenade launchers and more than 60 M-16s.” - [The LA Times](#)

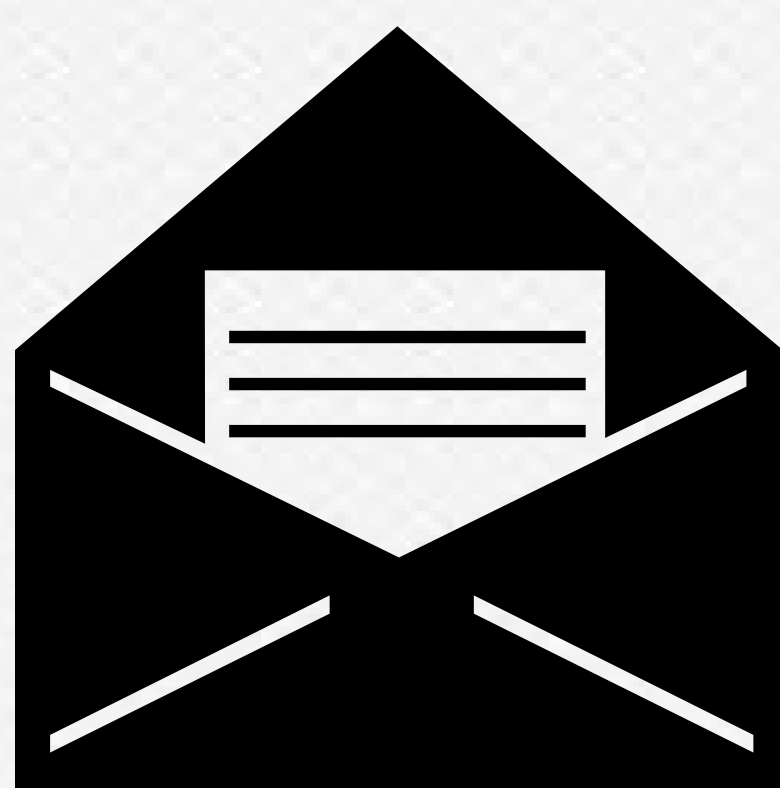
5

There is bipartisan and grassroots support to restrict and eventually eliminate 1033.

The FY 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) included a provision to [provide more oversight](#) of the 1033 Program and [limit the types of weapons](#) that could be transferred to police forces. In addition, the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which passed the House in March 2021, included a [section](#) that limits the 1033 program. **This must be only the beginning.** The Senate must act now. President Biden must put a moratorium on the 1033 Program, building on the limitations [implemented](#) by President Obama (and [revoked](#) by President Trump), following the lead of rights groups to demilitarize our communities. The following letters, signed by Win Without War, are examples of congressional lobbying efforts to end 1033:



[Letter](#) to the House Armed Services Committee on ending the 1033 Program



Civil Rights Coalition [Letter](#) on Federal Policing Priorities

At the heart of ending the 1033 Program are the grassroots organizations that are mobilizing to spread awareness about police brutality and militarization. Here are some highlights:



“It’s Time to [End 1033](#) Program in Los Angeles and Across the Country.”



“We demand an [immediate end](#) to the transfer of military equipment to federal, state, and local police, and campus law enforcement agencies.”

CAMPAIGN ZERO

“[End the supply](#) of federal military weaponry to local police departments under the 1033 program.”

What you can do

- 1** Sign [this](#) petition by Win Without War urging Congress to support Rep. Johnson's legislation to demilitarize police.
- 2** Sign [this](#) petition by the ACLU demanding an end to 1033.
- 3** [See](#) what your local police and sheriff's department received through the 1033 Program and organize with your local grassroots groups.

Conclusion



A black-and-white image of police officers wielding guns and wearing protective helmets and vests.

Weapons of war should not be used in the streets of the United States. But let's be clear: they shouldn't be used in Sanaa or Kabul either. Militarism abroad and militarism at home are two sides of the same deadly system — and rarely is that clearer than in the 1033 program.

To build a progressive, peaceful alternative to the militarized status quo abroad, we must do the same at home. We need to defund and dismantle our current systems of policing, not exacerbate them by providing police departments with free military equipment.